"For the human race has always lived and flourished, not by any one-sided exhibition of power, but by the constant sustenance and co-operation of the entire world of living beings. Not to seize power, but to protect and cherish life is the chief end of [hu]man[s]; and the godlike powers that the human race now commands only add to its responsibilities for self-discipline and make more imperative a post-magical, post-mechanical, post-nuclear ideology which shall be centered, not on power, but on life." -Lewis Mumford [1]

War and peace are themes that antedate the United States of America by millennia; war is not a product of human nature per se, but rather it is a product of human civilization: how can we reconcile the benefits of organized societies with the costs? This question motivates the author to attempt to answer the following questions in this piece: What are the costs of war, visible and hidden? How does continual preparation for organized, managed violence diminish the power of the people? What are alternative investments to improve society besides death and destruction dealing?

In assessing the costs of war, one must consider a variety of information sources, including the credibility and accuracy of these sources, and one must also consider costs that are not obvious to the lay observer. The benefits of war will not be considered here because the author believes it is the task of the proponents of mass violence to make justifications; suffice it to say, the author expects proponents of war to overemphasize the benefits, while undercounting or ignoring the human, social, economic and environmental costs. It is the task of the reader to complete the accounting by judging the net value of the war enterprise.

Starting with the physical, mental and moral injury of military personnel, the humans who are charged with the task of carrying out violence on behalf of the interests of the governing elite: Matthew Hoh, a conscientious, disabled military veteran writes about what the government attempts to conceal in its war propaganda: veterans who survive the military, whether or not they engage in combat, by vice of being immersed in a culture of coercion, not only are harmed in ways that are visible, but also are harmed mentally and emotionally. Post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, moral injury, and suicide are the common invisible costs to veterans. [2] Veterans experience housing insecurity like poor people across the country. Moreover, military experience is an indicator of future gun violence at home, especially mass shooting events. [3]

The Costs of War project [4] at Brown University presents a scholastic treatment of the subject at hand and the reader is encouraged to visit the referenced website to examine key findings as well as in-depth analysis. Another source from which to consider the negative aspects of militarism is the War Resisters League pie chart. [5] This chart succinctly illustrates military spending as a fraction of total discretionary spending, already over half of the total.

Another survey of war cost is a recent book published by two associates of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. [6] What is often not emphasized by war proponents is the damage done to civilians and civilian infrastructure in targeted foreign countries, let alone the damage to the reputation of the United States as a benevolent actor in international affairs. Add to the reputational damage of the United States: torture, forced displacement, extraordinary rendition, the long term harm of destroyed civilian infrastructure on targeted populations, and the impunity with which it carries out international war crimes and crimes against humanity. [7]

What this loss of blood and treasure preliminarily demonstrates is that legislators, and by extension their constituents, believe that war is worth the cost; otherwise, it seems more reasonable that representatives would be appropriating federal funds in more socially useful ways. It also reveals a popular belief that violence can be a viable means to peace, when, rather, it is more likely that violence, or the threat of violence, begets more violence. Hence the perpetuity of the enterprise. But this conclusion that public opinion is in favor of permanent war is premature in that it ignores how the arms and surveillance industry, the merchants of death, and the corporate media create and manage demand for war by manipulating public opinion in favor of war.

Turning to the concept of manufacturing consent for a moment will reveal how public opinion is distorted and controlled by a self-aggrandizing executive branch of government. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the Bush administration fabricated intelligence to falsely justify the illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003. The administration made two claims to the public that were false, claims that were made for the express purpose of winning over support from the American public. The claims were: the government of Iraq was involved in the planning and execution of the events that have become known as the "9/11 attack;" and that the government of Iraq had in its possession weapons of mass destruction that posed an imminent threat to the United States. Both of these claims were false, yet the leadership at the Central Intelligence Agency allowed its directive for fair and balanced intelligence to be corrupted by the political and military needs of their boss. [8]

By feeding politicized, militarized false intelligence to the corporate media, and by an uncritical reporting of intelligence manipulation by the media, manufactured was the consent of the governed to violate international law by acting out aggression without a United Nations Security Council resolution. Just as in Gaza where journalists who report on Israeli Occupation Force crime are targeted for killing, the United States developed a reputation for the same treatment of unembedded journalists covering their criminal acts: journalists who did not portray the United States military invasion and occupation in a favorable light were classed as military threats and targeted, despite their protection by international law.

To be complete in tracking harms, bear in mind that federal funds are limited, and funds spent on war are not spent on rooting out poverty, a known driver of structural violence, an invisible killer of the poor and socioeconomically disadvantaged. Failing to provide economic opportunities to the poor increases the likelihood that they will themselves be the target of domestic state violence in the form of criminalization and punishment. [9]

Another facet of the war machine is the role and responsibility of the private sector in the commission of war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. Businesses such as Lockheed Martin, Boeing, RTX/Raytheon and General Atomics have been put under trial by the War Crimes Tribunal. Their report [10] demonstrates the culpability of these war machine producers; these are the same producers that receive government contracts from the War Department, effectively subsidizing their business costs. All of this violence-dealing in the name of generating profits for shareholders. If war were not so profitable to the few and powerful, then it would probably not be pursued with such vigor. Moreover, the United States is the world's most significant arms producer and exporter, essentially fueling wars across the globe even without the direct involvement of the United States military. And these very corporations influence Congress by lobbying in their own interest, not in the interest of the public.

As if human, social, and economic costs were not enough, environmental impacts are the main subject of Peace and Planet News: Special Issue on Militarism and Climate Change. [11] From destroying marine habits and annihilating marine lifeforms, to emitting greenhouse gases at a rate greater than any other institution, to contaminating soil and water with toxic substances, the United States' military is yet another polluter who does not pay for the harm it does to the capacity for life to regenerate itself. [12]

The power of the people is diminished by constant preparation for and engagement in state violence. Article 1, Section 8, Clause 11 of the United States constitution states that the power to declare war is an authority that belongs exclusively to Congress. Quoting Bruce Fein, "Congress acted only after foreign aggression had already broken the peace (the War of 1812, World War II), or after the president through deceit had duped Congress and the American people into believing that foreign aggression had occurred (the Mexican-American War, the Spanish-American War, and World War I)." [13]

This means that the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, the Afghanistan War, the Iraq War, the Iran War, all of the clandestine paramilitary acts of war following the end of World War Two, and all of the smaller military interventions have all been unconstitutional war acts!

Fein explains that Congress has slowly been surrendering its constitutional authority to a self-aggrandizing, unitary executive branch with increasingly fewer limits on its power: a

constitutional crisis in the making for decades. Congress must reclaim its war declaring power! Acts of war that are not authorized by Congress must be strictly prohibited.

Consider also that the Department of Defense has never passed an audit as required by law, and also as required in the constitution. [14] Article 1, Section 9, Clause 7 requires that: "No Money shall be drawn from the Treasury, but in Consequence of Appropriations made by Law; and a regular Statement and Account of the Receipts and Expenditures of all public Money shall be published from time to time." Not knowing the extent to which federal funds are wasted or expended fraudulently or unethically makes it impossible for the public to make informed decisions about whether to support or reject military funding. It is the belief of the author that Congress should exercise its power of the purse by refusing to fund the military until it can pass an audit. Audits should be comprehensive, descriptive, accurate, and made available for anyone in the public to read. Much of the funds appropriated to the military are dispensed to private industry where it becomes more difficult for the public to judge how these funds are actually spent down to the penny. A common excuse that is given is that there are far too many military assets to count, thus the War Department cannot be audited. This suggests that the military should be made to a size that allows it to be audited, rather than allowing it to continue to be rewarded for its excess.

This account of the culture of war would not be complete without addressing, if only in passing, a few of the mythological narratives that animate the war spirit. Myths such as American exceptionalism, or the notion that global dominance is the only way to obtain national security, are fiercely held beliefs, as much as they may be false. The idea that the United States is the global "good guy," and that this necessarily may entail doing some bad things because, in the end, it is for a good cause (perhaps an oversimplification of the myth) causes believers of this myth to minimize in their imagination the harms of militarism. [15] The Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft has made its mission one to balance the force of make-believe: "to expose the dangerous consequences of an overly militarized American foreign policy and present an alternative approach, centered on diplomacy and military restraint." [16] [17]

Upon drawing one's own conclusion of the net value of what is euphemistically called "defense," one may rightfully ask, how then to spend federal funds? This is a question that is only limited by one's own imagination. This author would suggest federal spending on addressing social needs at home, such as housing, employment, education, health care, and child care. [18]

People of conscience must condemn the war funding: permanent war makes the United States less secure; causes incalculable harm to civilians abroad and to military enlistees; sinks the nation further into a debt it cannot repay; and pollutes the environment beyond

restoration. Representative Katherine Clark voted to approve the 2026 National Defense Authorization Act, an appropriation of $901 billion. She has failed to uphold her oath to defend the constitution from the abuses of the unitary executive branch, especially by failing to reclaim the war power, which is a power that only the legislative branch has the authority to exercise, but also by failing to lead impeachment proceedings. The Democratic Party establishment would sell the nation out to get an electoral upper hand, so it does not pursue impeachment: this is not the sort of representation Massachusetts fifth congressional district needs! [19]

Tarik Samman has a personal experience at the receiving end of the United State's sledgehammer approach to foreign policy; he has promised to fight for the social needs of Massachusetts fifth congressional district; he is not corrupted by having held an office for several terms: this constituent confidently endorses congressional candidate Tarik Samman! [20] Vote to elect Tarik in the Democratic Party primary on September 1 and in the general election! Unlike the incumbent Representative Katherine Clark whose entire campaign is enriched and funded by corporate interests, I am confident that Tarik will not serve the special interests of war profiteers, but rather serve the interests of constituents.

Editorial note: The views expressed in this piece are the views of the author, written to endorse Tarik's candidacy, and his goal of ending endless wars and investing that money at home instead.

About the author: Christopher Leonard is an independent voter, a passionate war resister, and a food service worker.

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